

Extract from *Fire Mask* by Franzeska G Ewart



The following extract is taken from *Fire Mask* by Franzeska G Ewart (Barrington Stoke). *Fire Mask* was written as part of a co-authorship programme that involved author, Franzeska G Ewart, working with six different Midlothian schools to produce a book. For information about the project, see the September '09 issue of *Junior Ed PLUS* or visit Franzeska's website (www.franzeskaewart.com).

Day 4 Bad Dream

My body hurts all over tonight, and I'm covered in cuts. My eyes just want to shut, but I really need to write this.

I need to write it, to make sense of what happened today. So that tomorrow, when I tell the police, I tell it right.

I'll start with the dream I had. The nightmare I had. Because if it hadn't been for that nightmare, maybe the whole thing wouldn't have happened.

I'm in school, walking down the dark, endless corridor. All I can see are outlines. Suddenly there's a flash, and everything's bright white.

Then Dad, in an electric wheelchair, wheels across the corridor in front of me. He's not wearing a mask, but I can't see his face. I try to shout "Dad!" but nothing comes. I run, try to follow him. But he's gone.

Then my brother Larry appears, wearing a white mask. He's got something in his hand. A picture of Dad.

"Don't!" I shout, because I know what he's going to do. But he doesn't listen. I watch as he rips the picture into little pieces. They float to the ground like snowflakes. As I go to pick them up, I see them moving together again. Dad's face is looking up at me, and all the rips in the paper are red, ugly scars.

Now Larry's running away, laughing. Hundreds of masks are snowing down on him. The floor's white with them. He reaches the end of the corridor, throws away his mask, and vanishes. His laughter echoes back to me.

Now Dexter's beside me, wagging his tail and barking. Wanting out. We run together, down the corridor. I hear the masks snapping and crackling beneath our feet. It's a good sound.

On we run, Dexter and me. Past the office, down the steps, out of the school. The sky's black and filled with stars. There's a full moon. I see Dad's face in it. I think, Even the man in the moon's got scars.

Dexter's still barking, wanting his "walkies". Suddenly I think of all the good times Dexter and Larry and me had with my dad, before he got blown up. I wake. Anger's blinding me.

I was so angry when I woke up, I wanted to smash something. I picked up my pillow, banged it down on my bed, over and over. As if that pillow was Tiffany and Sandy.

How dare they give me such a bad nightmare? How dare they?

Wildly, I looked round my room for something to break, to rip, to destroy. I remember thinking, "This is what Larry must feel like, when the anger gets too much for him."

I pulled out my old toy box, found some plastic models, snapped off their heads.

It only made the anger worse. I looked in the box again, saw the old Hallowe'en mask, pulled it out.

I've had that mask for years. It's one of those rubbery ones, and it's pretty scary. It's got sea-blue skin, mad-looking eyes, and a mouthful of big horrible teeth.

And the hair's red and yellow, like flames swirling in a bonfire.

Extract taken from *Fire Mask* by Franzeska G Ewart (Barrington Stoke)

I stared and stared into the eyes of the mask. And the more I stared into those eyes of fire, the angrier I felt. As though the mask was sending its anger out to join my own.

Those eyes had such power! I really felt as if they could burn two holes right through my flesh and bones.

"It's what fire would look like, if it was a face," I thought. "It's a Fire Mask."

I put the Fire Mask on, and looked in the mirror. And that was when the brilliant idea came.

The brilliant idea that nearly killed Sandy...

I got dressed. I put on my black top with the red skulls. I knew it would look good with the Fire Mask.

I went downstairs. When Mum saw my top, she didn't say anything. She just banged a bowl of cereal down in front of me.

I ate my breakfast. I left for school. The Fire Mask smouldering in my pocket.

I've been to the museum hundreds of times. It's a mining museum. Dad's dad was a miner, and he used to take me.

He'd tell me stories of the old mining days, and show me all the secret places. I know that Mining Museum like the back of my hand.

When we arrived, they gave us yellow helmets. They took us to the tub circuit room, then up some steps to a metal walk-way. From the walk-way we could look down on the tubs with their loads of fake coal.

The yellow helmets had ear-phones, to tell us what everything was. I didn't listen. I wasn't interested. Today, I had only one thing on my mind.

Revenge.

"Opposite where you are standing," the voice in the ear-phones said, "you can see the control cabin. Inside are models of men at their control panels..."

I dumped the helmet. Stared at the dusty old dummies.

I'd seen them a million times. But today, for the first time, I thought how life-like they were. As if, any minute, they could turn round and stare at you with their dark, dummy eyes.

The tub circuit room was dead noisy. There was a soundtrack playing, of metal chains clanking and men shouting, and everyone in our class was shouting too. Their feet clattered on the metal walk-ways.

Tiffany and Sandy trailed behind everyone, talking and giggling. Mrs Todd kept telling us all to be quiet.

I hung back. Let them go on. When they were far enough away, I went up to Tiffany.

"See them dummies," I said. "Sometimes they come alive."

Tiffany looked down her nose at me, and her ice-blue eyes laughed. Not the way Dad's eyes used to laugh, though. But mocking. Sneering.

"Is that a fact, Squirt?" she said, giving Sandy a look. "Is that what your daddy told you?"

"You watch." I said. "You'll see."

They doubled up with laughter. At least, Tiffany did. Sandy pretended to, but she was looking at me.

Looking at me as though she was worried about me.

When they turned and ran after the class, I didn't follow.

Extract taken from *Fire Mask* by Franzeska G Ewart (Barrington Stoke)

I know a quick way over to the other side. A narrow walk-way they don't like you using. I crossed, and crept round till I was near the cabin. I leaned over the red safety rail. Watched Mrs Todd giving out sketch pads and pencils. Supposing she noticed I wasn't there?

Right under my feet, stuck to the wall, was a black metal ladder. I squeezed under the safety rail, pulled myself on.

The ladder was slippery. And it went straight down, to a sort of ledge. The ledge was covered in loose stones and broken glass. Below I could see piles of rubble, with bushes and ferns growing in between. There were bits of brick-work, with rusty old pipes sticking out. And there was a great big crack in the ground.

From far, far down, I heard water dripping.

Below that big crack, I knew, was the mineshaft.

I shouldn't have climbed down that ladder. When I got to the bottom, I shouldn't have climbed over the chain with the Danger. Keep Out notice. And I shouldn't have crept up the metal steps to the cabin, or pushed open the door with the Strictly No Entry sign.

It was anger made me do it. Wild, seething anger, hot as the Fire Mask's flaming eyes. Hot as the fire that burned my dad's face off...

That'll have to do. Can't write any more. Need to sleep.

I'll write the rest tomorrow...

Extract taken from *Fire Mask* by Franzeska G Ewart (Barrington Stoke)